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Part 1: News Analysis

Turkmenistan's president moved closer to a unified, law-based approach to cooperation and non-aggression with the other Caspian littoral states at a summit October 12-16 in Tehran. He inked an agreement to create a major rail link from Iran to Kazakhstan, but the summit failed to resolve the key dispute, regarding seabed demarcation. President Berdymukhamedov's public criticism of his government's oil and gas sector's "unsatisfactory" performance and assurance of reform coincided with a major energy summit in Vilnius examining European energy security.

The Caspian leaders' agreement contained important affirmations of principles of international law and guidelines of behavior that create a vital political framework, even if the legal treaty is still out of reach. The Tehran declaration reaffirms the sovereignty of all the states, and obliges each state to refrain from permitting the aggression of any other state on their territory against each other. According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty analysis this week, the latter appears to be a not-so-veiled reference to the potential for the U.S. to use Azerbaijan to challenge neighboring Iran. Russian president Vladimir Putin was keen to gain recognition of "the impossibility of providing our own territory for other countries in case of aggression or some other military actions against one of the Caspian Sea states," yet left open the question of Russian assistance to Turkmenistan to re-activate Soviet-era nuclear missile silos in the event of an Iranian-US confrontation.

Turkmenistan also sent Bayrammyrat Myradov, executive director of Turkmenistan's presidential State Agency for Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources, to the Vilnius Global Energy Security Forum 2007. This conference seeks to establish Europe's energy independence from Russia through support of the Nabucco and other pipelines outside of Russia's control.

In its annual report on worldwide press freedom, released 16 October, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Turkmenistan among the third last of 169 countries surveyed, just above North Korea and Eritrea. RSF acknowledged the increased availability of the Internet in Turkmenistan this year, but prematurely lauded a move by the Turkmen government website to open up comments from readers. The decision was reversed soon after RSF's report was issued and soon after the EU's foreign policy envoy Javier Solana left Turkmenistan last week. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that only 15 comments managed to appear before the closure; one called for the release of Turkmenistan's political prisoners.

No further news of any releases of political prisoners was available this week since the pardon of some 9,000 prisoners in early October. Forum 18 News Service reported this week that 3 of 5 jailed Jehovah's Witnesses were amnestied, while a Baptist, Vyacheslav Kalataevsky, was amnestied but not freed and will likely be deported. Human rights "ambassadors" from France, Germany, Spain and Sweden visited the Turkmen capital this week for meetings with government officials. It is unclear whether they attempted to meet with citizens or victims of human rights violations and how their trip conclusions would impact their respective countries' relations with Turkmenistan.

The well-publicized change in the country's currency, scheduled to take effect in 2009, sent mixed messages characteristic of the post-Niyazov period: The face of former president Saparmurat Niyazov will be eliminated in part but not completely, remaining only on the 500-manat note.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: Turkmenistan moved closer to a unified, law-based approach to cooperation and non-aggression with the other Caspian littoral states at a summit this week in Tehran. President Berdymukhamedov's public criticism of his government's oil and gas sector's "unsatisfactory" performance and assurance of reform coincided with a major European energy summit in Vilnius. Turkmenistan ranked among the last three countries in Reporters Without Borders's annual global press freedom survey. Coinciding with the visit of senior EU officials last week, the government allowed unprecedented public comment to be posted on its website, but shut it down again two days later.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Caspian Summit Fails To Resolve Key Questions

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Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/10/36f9967b-02cd-4aa5-a6e2-d441c8fb78ac.html>

Excerpt: Sea or lake? Hopes were high that the leaders of the five Caspian littoral states, who met today in Tehran, would finally resolve their long-standing dispute over the definition of the world's largest inland body of water, rferl.org reported. The answer to that question is key to clarifying the Caspian's legal status -- and establishing how to exploit, and export, the vast energy reserves beneath its seabed. Alas, it wasn't to be. In their declaration after the summit, the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan dodged the key question of legal status. Instead, they called for rational use of Caspian biological resources, and also pledged not to be involved in an attack on any of the other littoral states.

The declaration stated that "the parties underline that under no circumstances would they allow other nations to use their territory for waging aggression or other military action against any of the parties." Analysts said that clause could be aimed at easing concerns in Tehran over possible attempts by the United States to use Azerbaijani territory for a military attack on Iran, which has defied Western calls to cooperate on its nuclear program. "It is also important that we talk about the impossibility of providing our own territory for other countries in case of aggression or some other military actions against one of the Caspian Sea states," Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

Another point of the declaration raised eyebrows. Seemingly at the request of Russia and Iran, one section requires consent from all five nations before any of them can build a pipeline under the Caspian. Western countries led by the United States currently back such projects as way to bypass both Russian and Iranian territory. Another point specifies that only vessels flying the flag of one of the five littoral states are allowed to ply Caspian waters. Putin suggested such wording confirms the "sovereignty over the Caspian of only the Caspian states, including the use of subsoil resources."

[Passage omitted: on status of Caspian since collapse of USSR in 1991, and relevance of treaties of 1921 and 1940 in absence of new deal.]

[Passages omitted: on gains for Kazakhstan and losses for Iran if Caspian is defined as a sea, and Iran's proposal to force equal distribution of profits.]

Moscow has traditionally favored labeling the Caspian a sea -- not merely because Russia's sector is the largest after Kazakhstan but also because Russian businesses are active on Kazakhstan's Caspian shore. Putin said today that the Caspian's "territory should not be covered with state borders, sectors, and exclusive zones. The less area they occupy, and the more the waters and the surface remain for common use by the Caspian states, the better."

[Passages omitted: on Russian support for Iranian proposal to make Caspian economic grouping, and announcement that next Caspian summit will be in 2008 in Baku.]

b. Iranian Leader Calls for Expanded Ties With Turkmenistan

Original title: Supreme Leader Calls for Expanding Iran-Turkmenistan Ties. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: IRNA/10/16/07

Full version: <http://www2.ima.ir/en/news/view/menu-234/0710161832195108.htm>

Synopsis: Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said October 16 following a meeting with Turkmen President Berdymukhamedov that there are ample grounds for expansion of economic cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan, mainly in the gas sector, IRNA reported. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was also present in the meeting. President Berdymukhamedov said his government has made substantial efforts to broaden ties with Tehran.

c. Turkmenistan Lauds Tehran Summit

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Press TV/presstv.ir/10/17/07

Full version: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=27452§ionid=351020101>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov declared the outcome of the Caspian Sea Littoral States Summit in Tehran October 12 "positive," presstv.ir of Iran reported. He said the tripartite agreement to construct a railway is a "very important and historic document" that would facilitate connection between Central Asian states, Russia, and the Persian Gulf. The exchange of millions of tons of goods would generate revenues for Turkmenistan, he said.

d. Caspian Sea States Reaffirm Principles of Sovereignty, Non-Aggression, and Environmental Cooperation

Original title: Caspian Summit in Tehran Ends with Final Declaration. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Press TV/presstv.ir/10/17/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11313&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: The second summit of the Caspian Sea littoral states, in Tehran, ended October 16 with the presidents of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan in attendance, turkmenistan.ru reported. The process was begun by Turkmenistan with the first summit in 2002. Speaking at the gathering, President Berdymukhamedov said, "Turkmenistan rejects the practice of unilateral activities in the Caspian Sea, first of all with regards to exploration of disputable oil fields." The president invoked "universally recognized norms and principles of international law" to ensure respect of sovereignty and equitable relations among regional partners, and respect for the legitimate rights and interests of Turkmenistan, turkmenistan.ru reported.

A joint declaration was adopted to define a set of principles of behavior for the Caspian Sea states, to serve as a political guide until the adoption of a convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The declaration acknowledges the sovereign rights of the Caspian Sea states in relation to the Caspian Sea and its resources; the need for urgent joint efforts to resolve ecological problems in the region; and defines navigation regulations exclusively for Caspian Sea states' ships. The document asserts the right of countries to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. It also notes that the littoral states will not allow other states to use their territories to commit aggression or stage military activities against any Caspian Sea state. The next summit will take place in Baku in 2008.

e. Presidents Discuss Global Energy Security in Vilnius Forum

Original title: Chair Conclusions of Vilnius Energy Security Conference 2007. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: vilniusconference2007.lt/10/12/07

Source: BBC Monitoring Central Asia/Baltic News Service/10/09/07

Full version: <http://www.vilniusconference2007.lt/en/news.full/120>

Synopsis: Seven presidents, twelve ministers and top-ranking officials of the EU and US as well as experts from energy companies gathered in Vilnius to discuss global energy security in search of a framework for EU external energy policy, vilniusconference2007.org reported October 12. The leaders met October 11 to address global and European energy challenges and called for common action to enhance the security of energy supplies during potential crises. Conference participants endorsed an Energy Policy for Europe which identifies a need to increase security of supply, enhance commercial competition, promote environmental sustainability, and mitigate climate change. Participants agreed on the need for closer energy cooperation among Europe, the US and the Caspian and Black Sea regions to create Central-Asia-South Caucasus-Europe corridors of energy supply crucial for reliable and diverse energy flows to the EU.

Bayrammyrat Myradov, executive director of Turkmenistan's presidential State Agency for Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources, took part in the conference, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing Baltic News Service.

f. Uzbek President Visits Turkmenistan

Original title: *Islam Karimov Arrives in Ashgabat. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/18/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=ru&elem_id=11324&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Uzbek President Islam Karimov arrived in Ashgabat for talks with President Berdymukhamedov and other officials on October 18, turkmenistan.ru reported. A number of agreements are expected to be signed. "The approaches to the development of bilateral relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan envision a rational use of existing and prospective economic opportunities and mutually beneficial contacts," the State Information Agency (TDH) reported.

g. Columbia University Officials Accept Invitation to Visit Turkmenistan

Original title: *A Letter to the President of Turkmenistan. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/14/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=071014a>

Synopsis: Catherine Nepomnyashchii, vice chancellor of the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, and Ann Olin, chairperson of the Slavic Studies Department of Barnard College, sent a letter to President Berdymukhamedov after his lecture at Columbia University September 24, the official Turkmen government website reported

The university officials expressed thanks and accepted the Turkmen government's invitation to visit universities in Turkmenistan.

h. European Human Rights "Ambassadors" Visit Turkmenistan

Original title: *Human Rights Ambassadors Visit Turkmenistan. Excerpted and translated by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Official website of the Government of Turkmenistan/10/14/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=5&id=071017a>

Excerpt: A delegation of human rights ambassadors is visiting Turkmenistan, with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of four European countries – Michel Doucin (France), Guenter Nooke (the Federal Republic of Germany), Silvio Escobar (Spain) and Jan Nordlander (the Kingdom of Sweden), the official Turkmen government website reported.

The guests will be received at the Mejlis of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights under President of Turkmenistan. The delegation will hold meetings with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry and the teaching staff and students of the Faculty of Law of the Magtumguly Turkmen State University.

i. Moscow Patriarchate Takes Over Orthodox Congregations in Turkmenistan

Original Title: *Orthodox Congregations in Turkmenistan Come Under Jurisdiction of Holy Patriarchy of Moscow and All Russia.*

Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/13/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11289&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: At a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on October 12, the congregations of the Russian Orthodox Church in Tashkent and the Central Asian eparchy on the territory of Turkmenistan were discussed, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the press service of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The members of the Synod decided to set up a church under the jurisdiction of the Holy Patriarchy of Moscow and all Russia in Turkmenistan, which will be detached from the Tashkent and Central Asian eparchy.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Turkmen President Fires Heads of Ashgabat and Dashoguz Province Police Departments

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/15/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11309&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov signed a decree dismissing Kakaly Tyllayev, head of the Ashgabat police department, for "serious shortcomings in his work," turkmenistan.ru reported. A separate decree sacked the head of the Dashoguz province police departments on the same grounds, turkmenistan.ru reported.

b. Turkmen Citizens' Complaints On Interior Ministry Doubled

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: turkmenistan.ru/10/09/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11246&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: At a Ministry of Internal Affairs meeting October 8, President Berdymukhamedov conceded that the number of Turkmen citizens' complaints on the illegal activities of some officials has doubled, turkmenistan.ru reported. "It looks like the winds of change have passed by the Interior Ministry where the standards of responsibility and competence fell as low as it can go," the president said, commenting that they would have to restore their credibility. The meeting was also used to expose the misdeeds of the former minister, Hojamyrat Annagurbanov, who was dismissed last week.

At the meeting Prosecutor General Muhammetguly Ogshukov spoke about cases of mass bribe-taking, falsification of evidence, and distortion of reports, about which he said the former minister was reportedly aware, and which he allegedly directly ordered, along with reportedly ordering that crimes committed by his nephew be covered up. The president also reprimanded the Internal Affairs department in charge of fire safety for the blaze in the central marketplace of Ashgabat in September.

c. Turkmen Leader Reprimands Oil and Gas Sector; Calls for "Radical Reform"

Original title: *Turkmen President Calls For Radical Reform Of Oil And Gas Sector.* *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: [Interfax/10/16/07](http://interfax.com/10/16/07)

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has severely criticized Turkmenistan's fuel and energy sector, [Interfax](http://interfax.com) reported, citing the president's remarks at a televised meeting with officials from the oil and gas sector on October 15. "The results achieved do not match the real potential of the country's oil and gas industry, the growth rates needed for the Turkmen economy at a new stage of its history and for the tasks outlined," [Interfax](http://interfax.com) quoted him as saying.

"The performance in the fuel and energy sector does not match the huge amounts of money allocated. This is why the performance of the fuel and energy sector in general should be rated as unsatisfactory," he said. After hearing progress reports, the president has been move to severely criticize the poor showing, even calling for what he called "radical reforms".

d. Four Religious Prisoners Pardoned in Turkmenistan; One May be Deported

Original title: *Turkmenistan: Four Prisoners Amnestied, One to Be Deported?* Synopsis prepared by Forum 18 News Service.

Source: *Forums 18 News Service*/forum18.org/10/09/07

Full version: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1031

Synopsis: Four of the six religious prisoners of conscience in Turkmenistan have been amnestied, Forum 18 News Service reported. However, one of the four--Baptist pastor Vyacheslav Kalataevsky--remains in custody and may be deported. "We're worried as there is only a small hope that he will be allowed to stay here," members of Kalataevsky's family told Forum 18. "The family and the Church want him to stay--and he wants to stay." They say the Ukrainian embassy has also appealed to the Turkmen authorities for Kalataevsky--a Ukrainian citizen--to be allowed to remain with his family in Turkmenistan. The three other amnestied religious prisoners are all Jehovah's Witnesses who were serving suspended sentences for refusing compulsory military service on grounds of religious conscience. But not freed under amnesty were Jehovah's Witnesses Bayram Ashirgeldyyev and Begench Shakhmuradov. Both are serving two-year suspended sentences which place limitations on their activities.

e. Turkmenistan Third Worst in Media Freedom: RSF

Original title: *Government Urged to Pursue Liberalisation after Opening Website to Comments.*

Source: *rsf.org*/10/16/07

Full version: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=23952. The full report may be accessed at http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20828

Synopsis: Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Turkmenistan among the three worst violators of media freedom in its annual global survey, released on October 16. But it also voiced "surprise and hope" in a statement on learning that it became possible the previous week for the public to post comments on the government website, www.turkmenistan.gov.tm, which has sections in English and Russian as well as Turkmen.

"This might seem like a trivial development in democratic countries, but it is a significant step towards greater freedom of expression in what is one of world's most isolated regimes," the press freedom organisation said. "We must avoid raising our hopes too much, as a U-turn is always possible, but we hail this decision and we hope it will soon be followed by similar measures."

The opening up of the government site to comments came during a visit by Javier Solana, the European Union high representative for foreign and security policy, accompanied by Pierre Morel, the EU special representative for Central Asia.

f. Turkmen Government Reverses Decision to Open Up Web Site to Comments

Original title: *Turkmen State Website Removes Readers' Comments Feature.*

Source: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*/rferl.org/10/16/07. Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2007/10/161007.asp#archive>

In a dramatic about-face from its earlier decision, the Turkmen authorities removed on October 12 a new readers' comments feature that it had touted as an example of freedom of information only two days earlier, RFE/RL reported. The decision removed the feedback option for the Turkmen government's official website, Altyn Asyr (The Golden Age), or turkmenistan.gov.tm, thereby blocking the posting of unsolicited comments by viewers. Of the only about 15 comments posted to the website during the two days posts were allowed, several offered mild criticism of former President Saparmurat Niyazov and one called on President Berdymukhammedov to release all political prisoners held in Turkmen prisons.

g. Turkmen Leader Permits Foreign Investors to Create Companies, Own Real Estate

Original title: *Turkmenistan Allows Foreign Investors to Own Companies, Property, in Move Away From Isolation. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *Associated Press/Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan/10/12/07*

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov adopted legislation permitting foreign investors to create companies and own property in Turkmenistan, the Associated Press reported, citing the state newspaper *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*. An amended law on foreign investment passed October 12 allows investors to create and fully own companies and to acquire existing companies and property, including real estate. The president hopes to attract investment to a special economic zone in the Caspian city of Turkmenbashi.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Russia's MTS Plans to Open Up Mobile Internet in Turkmenistan

Original title: *Turkmenistan Opens Up to Mobile Internet Service. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *reuters.com/10/15/07*

Full version: <http://www.reuters.com/article/companyNewsAndPR/idUSL1534468920071015>

Synopsis: Russian telecoms company MTS plans to offer mobile Internet services in Turkmenistan, Reuters reported. Mobile Internet service will be made available to customers starting November 1, MTS said, adding, however that it would hold no responsibility for which web sites its users chose to use. "We have received the GPRS [General Packet Radio Service] license starting November," an MTS official was quoted as saying.

Under Turkmenistan's sole Internet provider, Turkmentelekom, private users cannot open up a number of opposition and media web sites. Only a few hundred people are able to access the Internet regularly now says MTS; if their customers do prove to be able to access the Internet, this figure could rise significantly. MTS currently has 250,000 mobile phone customers in Turkmenistan, and its main domestic rival, Altyn Asyr GSM, plans to expand its customer base to 100,000 from the current 43,000.

b. Caspian States Sign Tripartite Railway Agreement

Original title: *Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan to Build Regional Railway Link. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *hemscott.com/Thompson Financial/Interfax/10/12/07*

Full version: <http://www.hemscott.com/news/latest-news/item.do?newsId=51178830833665>

Synopsis: The presidents of Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan signed a trilateral agreement in Tehran on October 12 concerning the construction of a railway linking their three countries, hemscott.com reported, citing Thompson Financial and Interfax. The agreement was concluded during the Caspian Sea summit, but details on the time frame and cost of the project were not available.

c. Turkmenistan to Remove Zeros, Former President's Profile from Currency

Original title: *Turkmenistan To Knock Zeros, Former Dictator off Banknotes. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *New Eurasia/ru. turkmenistan.neweurasia.net/10/12/07/turkmenistan.ru/10/11/07*

Full version: <http://ru.turkmenistan.neweurasia.net/?p=39>

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11278&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Turkmenistan is to introduce new bank notes in 2009, evidently with fewer zeros (the exact reduction is not known—OSI TP) and with the profile of the late dictator Saparmurat Niyazov to be removed except for on the new 500-manat note, report New Eurasia and turkmenistan.ru. The British company De La Rue International, Inc. will design the bills.

New banknotes valued at one to 500 manats instead of 50-10,000 will be printed, and the image of Niyazov's head, which currently appears on all bills. Turkmen authorities did not say whether they plan to devalue the currency when the new notes are introduced, says New Eurasia. The rate of exchange is fixed by the government at 5,200 manat to the dollar, but on the black market, dollars are worth about 24,000 manat.

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